



The Over the Hill Gang rides again: having a laugh at their own expense

Sea Shepherd from Outer Space

STAR TREK IV: THE VOYAGE HOME Directed by Leonard Nimoy
Screenplay by Steve Meerson, Peter Krikes, Harve Bennett and Nicholas Meyer

Trekkies are the Moonies of pop culture. Since the tatty sci-fi series *Star Trek* went off the air in 1969, they have devoted themselves with canonical fervor to annotating and explicating the 79 episodes. To Trekkies it matters not that the show was bad science and worse fiction, or that its actors, outfitted in futuristic Dr. Dentons, read their portentous lines with nitwit solemnity. The show's only soaring spin-off was *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979), in which the cast took a back seat to a splendid special-effects light show that made an eloquent case for the fusion of art and technology, man and machine. Trekkies, of course, consider it anathema—too much hardware, not enough kitsch.

Still, the movie was popular enough to tag the property as a solid box-office attraction. And gradually, the films' creators managed to beam the series up to competence, even to emotional resonance. In 1982 *The Wrath of Khan* brought Admiral Kirk (William Shatner) back from the executive junk heap to conquer both an old nemesis and a mid-life crisis. In 1984 *The Search for Spock* resurrected Mr. Spock (Leonard Nimoy) for a reunion with Kirk that was tender enough to make a Vulcan almost cry. Now comes *The Voyage Home*—and a radical, canny shift of moods. This time, if you laugh at *Star Trek*, you are in good company. The whole starship *Enterprise* crew is giggling up its polyester sleeves.

The plot could be torn from yesterday's headlines: SEA SHEPHERD FROM OUTER SPACE. Imagine that the environmental activists who recently sank two Icelandic whaling vessels were the rulers

of a 23rd century planet, and that they had sent to earth a probe with signals that could be answered only by humpback whales—a species that had been hunted to extinction by blubber-lusting 20th century man. If the whales don't talk back, the earth blows up. So the *Star Trek* crew must become time travelers. They must boomerang their stolen Klingon warship around the sun, land in San Francisco in 1986, steal a whale or two and transport their precious cargo... back to the future!

Take one more ride in Hollywood's favorite pop-satirical time machine, while the *Enterprisers* try to pass themselves off as primitive earthlings. With the help of Co-Screenwriter Nicholas Meyer (who, in *Time After Time*, propelled H.G. Wells and Jack the Ripper into San Francisco in 1979), they do just fine. Dr. "Bones" McCoy (DeForest Kelley) brazens his way through a little miracle surgery; Chekov (Walter Koenig), the Russian, has to explain his way out of an American nuclear submarine; Scotty (James Doohan) brings postmodern plastics to Marin County. And Spock, wandering around Golden Gate Park in a Vulcan bathrobe and proving his ineptness with the local slang, must be passed off as a casualty of the '60s free-speech movement. "He did a little too much LDS," Kirk explains helpfully.

It is familiar stuff, and even a die-hard *Star Trasher* may regret that these stolid figures of fun have decided to have a few laughs at their own expense, as if they were doing a turn for some intergalactic David Letterman. Still, the film should have appeal—skin-deep but worldwide—for novices and exegetes alike. Watch it make a bundle.

—By Richard Corliss

Top Gunner

HEARTBREAK RIDGE
Directed by Clint Eastwood
Screenplay by James Carabatsos

"You ought to be sealed in a case labeled 'Break open only in case of war.'" So sneers the CO as he welcomes Gunnery Sergeant Tom Highway (Clint Eastwood) to his latest assignment in a career that stretches from Korea in Tom's distinguished past to Grenada in the near future. But it is the assignment Highway wanted: top kick of a reconnaissance platoon in dire need of the kind of training only he can provide.

Have you met this character before? The Medal of Honor winner who can out-drink, outbrawl and outcuss any other man in the joint? Of course you have. Have you consorted with his unit before, an ill assortment of the flaky, the surly and the klutzy? Naturally. And do you just somehow know that before the picture is over the sergeant will weld them into a first-class fighting unit, in the process winning their unswerving loyalty and affection? You do just somehow know.

We are in the realm of genre movie-making here. But nobody does that with greater conviction, energy and unpatronizing affection for the grand old forms than Eastwood. He also knows that by grounding his work with a few simple ironies, he can humanize his basic screen character, that of the dutiful loner, and separate it from upstarts like "Sly" Stallone and Chuck Norris. The sergeant's swearing, for example, is well beyond the grunting demands of realism; it is an aria of obscenities and more a commentary on macho posturing than an assertion of it. Same thing with the women's magazines he reads. See, he hopes to re-up with his ex-wife (Marsha Mason, full of fire and ire) and thinks maybe a little secondhand psychobabble ("Did we mutually nurture each other?") will do the job. It's funny, and makes his toughness all the tougher. *Heartbreak Ridge* is not great Eastwood, but it will tide us over until the next *Bronco Billy* or *Tightrope* swaggers into view.

—By Richard Schickel



Eastwood: outdrinkin', outbrawlin', outcussin'